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LIDDELL HART LOOKS AT THE GULF WAR

In covering the assigned readings on Liddell Hart, I was struck by the extent to which recent US strategy toward Iraq, on the battlefield and off, has tracked with Hart's prescriptions, i.e., the indirect approach. For this reason, I propose below to review the recent conduct of our relations with Iraq against the framework of Hart's writings with the aim of illuminating the extent to which the Administration utilized Hart's principles to success. Using Hart's distinction between grand strategy and strategy, and given the limitations of space, I have broken my analysis into two main parts: application of US "grand strategy" in advance of the commencement of hostilities, and US "strategy" in the war. I have deliberately not included a discussion of the relationship of our grand strategy to the achievement of post-war aims, because this topic would constitute a separate paper all by itself. Please note that all quotes are from the Excerpts from *Strategy* assigned reading. I have provided page numbers in parenthesis.

US GRAND STRATEGY BEFORE THE WAR

Without re-hashing a lot of history, it is fair to say that US grand strategy toward Iraq in the ten years or so preceding the invasion of Kuwait was founded on the use of non-military tools (e.g., diplomatic pressure, agricultural credits, etc.)

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aimed at achieving at least a couple of goals with regard to that country. One was the reduction of the threat of Iraqi aggression in the region. This effort failed.

(It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate Administration policy in this period. However, it is interesting to note that while the effort to prevent Iraqi aggression failed, another goal, use of Iraq to balance Iran, (arguably also the use of a Hartian "indirect approach at the level of grand strategy") succeeded. This points up the extent to which the implementation of a grand strategy, which inevitably involves competing goals and interaction with our grand strategies toward other countries or regions, is not a trivial undertaking.)

However one views the preceding historical period, I think it is fair to say that US action in the period between the invasion of Kuwait and the commencement of the air campaign was a brilliant application of Hart's notion of grand strategy. Hart believed that grand strategy should:

"...calculate and develop the economic resources and manpower of nations in order to sustain the fighting services. Also the moral resources -- for to foster the people's willing spirit is often as important as to possess the more concrete forms of power. Grand strategy, too, should regulate the distribution of power between the several services, and between the services and industry. Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy -- which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least, of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent's will..." (p. 141)

The Administration arguably achieved virtually all of Hart's goals. The relatively small-scale of the war to come (as compared with Hart's main subjects of concern, World Wars I and II), coupled with 8 years of Reagan defense build-up, even set

against the backdrop of a sluggish US economy, assured that the US had the economic resources and man-power to take on Iraq if needed. More interesting is the Administration's success in developing the necessary "moral resources" for the war. A variety of techniques were used, with propaganda high on the list. This included the personal demonization of Saddam Hussein (i.e., the President's comparison of him to Hitler), a sympathetic airing of Kuwaiti charges of Iraqi atrocities in Kuwait (some of which subsequently appeared to be manufactured), etc.

Perhaps more significant were Administration diplomatic moves (formation of the coalition and the securing of UN authorization for military action) aimed in part at solidifying domestic support for a war. Finally, intensive work with the Congress, leading to passage of a resolution supporting the war effort, eliminated any dispute over application of the War Powers amendment and firmly nailed down what Hart called "the people's willing spirit" for the war effort.

It is also interesting to note that Hart assigns to grand strategy the role of distributing power between the several services. It can be argued that Congressionally mandated efforts (via Goldwater-Nichols) had forced changes on the military that strengthened our ability to plan and conduct a joint and combined operation such as that needed against Iraq. Hart was prescient for seeing the importance of this point, and the Congress, for a change, deserves kudos for making it happen.

Hart, in the passage cited above, also notes the

significance of the non-military arrows in the quiver of the grand strategist. These tools were used by the US to the maximum extent possible, and included the freezing of Kuwaiti and Iraqi assets immediately after the invasion and the embargoes on Iraq and occupied Kuwait. It is worth noting here the significance that such efforts have to Hart and the relationship between these measures and the concept of "the indirect approach" with which we associate Hart. In his discussion of the concept of strategy (as opposed to grand strategy), drawing on Sun Tzu, Hart discusses the notion of "strategic dislocation", one of the elements key to the indirect approach. This dislocation, he notes, operates in both the physical and psychological spheres, one acting to weaken the opponent's physical strength, the other serving to unbalance him psychologically and to weaken his will. (p. 144)

Though not noted explicitly by Hart, clearly the same dichotomy exists in the use of some of the non-military means employed by the grand strategist. Hart notes that "psychological dislocation fundamentally springs from [the] sense of being trapped". (p. 141) The US formation of a coalition which included some of Iraq's fellow Arab states was in large measure a purely psychological effort to increase Saddam's "sense of being trapped" by isolating him and by foiling a predictable effort on his part to portray himself as the victim of US or Western persecution. (The Arab partners were not significant in terms of the military capabilities they brought to the party.) In contrast, US financial and economic measures against occupied Kuwait and Iraq served a dual purpose. They were designed both

to have an impact on Iraq's physical strength and to psychologically isolate the Iraqi regime and thus weaken its morale. (Arguably, given the brief amount of time they were given to work, they did not have a major impact on the course of events in the physical sphere.)

STRATEGY IN THE WAR

Following the commencement of the air war, we can see clearly the implementation of Hart's notions of "the indirect approach" in the strategy applied to the war. Arguably, Hart's most fundamental point regarding strategy, which he sharply contrasts with Clausewitz's concept, is that the battle is not necessarily the main goal of strategy. Rather, drawing heavily on Sun Tzu, he argues that the aim of the military strategist "is not so much to seek battle as to seek a strategic situation so advantageous that if it does not of itself produce the decision, its continuation by a battle is sure to achieve this. In other words, dislocation is the aim of strategy..." (p. 143). Elsewhere he adds that "the perfection of strategy would be...to produce a decision without any serious fighting". (p. 143) US prosecution of Desert Storm was by any measure an unusually successful application of Hart's principles.

One key to achieving the strategic advantage Hart sought is lies in producing a sense of dislocation in your opponent. I have discussed above the use of non-military measures by the US to add to Saddam Hussein's sense of dislocation. In the military sphere, virtually all of the elements recommended by Hart are

evident. In fact, one could argue that our military strategy did achieve Hart's goal of "produc[ing] a decision without any serious fighting," particularly if the level of fighting is compared with that anticipated by most observers before the start of the land campaign.

Key among the Hartian concepts used was the use of a pinning effort (or "distraction" in Hart's terms) followed by the "indirect" attack he so favored (i.e., the flanking movement through the desert). Consistent with Hart, this movement offered multiple benefits, from the ability to cut the Iraqi lines of communication, to creating a further sense of dislocation (both physical and psychological) for the Iraqi troops.

The coalition's indirect attack fit well with Stonewall Jackson's motto, quoted approvingly by Hart (p. 145) "Mystify, mislead, and surprise". This also highlights the extent to which the key Hartian elements of surprise and deception were central to US success in the war. The main thrust of the US attack (the flanking movement through the desert) was apparently a total surprise to the Iraqis. The use of deception (Marine amphibious exercises, the impression that the coalition forces opposite Kuwait were the main force, etc.) was key. US forces' ability to move quickly and "quietly" (e.g. via use of electronic counter-measures, etc.) provided the key element of secrecy of our intentions.

The air campaign deserves special mention as an important element leading to the Hartian "dislocation," physical and psychological, of the Iraqi forces. Heavy, continuous bombing of

front-line forces caused extensive physical damage, and helped achieve some of Hart's "physical" goals of upsetting the enemy's dispositions, and endangering his supplies and resupply. In addition, the psychological effects were significant. The bombing disoriented the troops, deprived them of rest, and crushed morale, even before their contact with the land forces.

The strategic bombing campaign was also a key factor and consistent with Hartian principles. That campaign constituted a major part of our effort to cut Iraqi command and control nets and further increase the troops' (and leaders') sense of isolation. Hart notes that psychological dislocation is increased if the commander's realization of being at a disadvantage is "sudden, and if he feels that he is unable to counter the enemy's move". (p. 144) The use of stealth aircraft and "unseen" cruise missiles in the initial raids, combined with subsequent total US air superiority underscores the extent to which Iraqi commanders' sense of dislocation was at a maximum throughout the air campaign.

The above summarizes a few of the main points of Hartian thinking which were successfully applied in the strategy for the war. Others, including Hart's eight (positive and negative) maxims (p. 150) (e.g., chose the line of least expectation (attack from out of the middle of the desert); exploit the line of least resistance (the flank in Iraq, not the forces arrayed in Kuwait), etc.) also apply to a remarkable degree.

CONCLUSION

I remain impressed by the extent to which the Bush Administration (unconsciously I assume) applied the main elements of Hart's thinking to prosecution of the war in the Gulf, and the extent to which these efforts were successful. This was true at both the levels of grand strategy and of strategy. It is worth stressing that to a certain extent our use of these ideas was made possible by relatively recent changes in the world and in our own thinking. For example, it was the collapse of communism that allowed the unprecedentedly large coalition to be formed, and the unprecedented series of UN resolutions to be passed. In addition, the advent of a US Administration which sees the importance for creating such coalitions (as opposed to going it alone) and for insuring a solid domestic base of support is also a relatively new development. Finally, the military doctrine and technology which permitted that level of joint and combined, maneuver warfare, secrecy and deception, as seen in the Gulf is itself relatively new. Hart's principles appear particularly applicable for the US as the world moves into a period of increasing instability and as the US seeks to maintain a leadership role in that world with increasingly limited resources. I hope that future administrations continue to apply so well Hart's concepts in furtherance of our national interest.